

Woodruff Place  
Bounded by E. Tenth, E. Michigan, and  
Tecumseh Sts. and Arsenal Technical  
High School  
Indianapolis  
Marion County  
Indiana

HABS No. IND-67

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. IND-67

WOODRUFF PLACE

- Location: A group of city blocks bounded as follows: East Tenth Street on the north, East Michigan Street on the South, Arsenal Technical High School (HABS No. IND-66) on the west, Tecumseh Street on the east.
- Present Owner: Private residences individually owned. Landscaped esplanades and fountains under jurisdiction of the Indianapolis Park and Recreation Department. Streets and period street lighting under jurisdiction of the Indianapolis Department of Transportation.
- Present Use: Public park and private residences.
- Statement of Significance: Woodruff Place was platted as a residential area in 1872. It is an early example of city planning designed to bring beauty into a residential area by means of landscaped esplanades, cast iron statuary and fountains, and regulated set backs. It continues to function today as a residential area with no commercial structures.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of platting: October 2, 1872, according to the "Plat of Subdivision...designated as 'Woodruff Place'" (Plat Book 4, p. 234, County Recorder's Office).
2. Planner: James O. Woodruff, the owner and original proprietor, did the planning, according to a newspaper obituary ("In Memoriam," Indianapolis Journal, June 7, 1879, p. 3).
3. Original and subsequent owners: James O. Woodruff, Ermine J. Woodruff, J. A. Comingore, and L. M. Comingore owned the land when it was platted, for they signed the plat of October 2, 1872, which was recorded on March 1, 1873 (Plat Book 4, p. 234). Woodruff paid \$240,000 for the land, purchasing it from the heirs of Reverend Rezin Hammond, who bought it in July 1821 (Nowland, Sketches of Prominent Citizens of 1876, Indianapolis, p. 384).
4. Original plan and construction: The statement which is included in the platting is quite descriptive (Plat Book 4,

p. 234). It reads in part: "A strip of ground two (2) feet in width along the entire length of the east side of said quarter section and a like strip along the North side of each of the Lots bordering on Clifford Avenue now East Tenth Street and like strip along the South side of the Lots bordering on Michigan Street, is hereby reserved for the location of the fence on the said three sides as shown in the Plat together with the Streets and alleys herein indicated are to be held as the private property of the owners of the several lots in the said Woodruff Place, collectively, and are to be perpetually held for the use and benefit of the said owners, as Streets, alleys and location for the fences, and not otherwise. The said streets and alleys not being dedicated to public use, but only designated as such for the private use of such persons as may become owners of the several Lots in this Plat."

It is interesting that the three landscaped esplanades are not shown on the plat nor mentioned in the accompanying statement. However, Jacob Piatt Dunn, in Greater Indianapolis, Chicago, 1910, Vol. K, p. 439, states that the streets were laid out with the central grass plots, flower beds, fountains, and hand-painted iron statuary. He notes that the deeds contained, in effect, setback restrictions limiting distances of buildings from property lines.

The original plat (Plat Book 4, p. 234) shows 181 lots, most of which are 80 feet wide and 170 feet deep. The three principal north-south streets, which now contain the esplanades, are 82 feet wide and 2471 feet long.

Woodruff spent \$250,000 improving and ornamenting Woodruff Place (Nowland, p. 314). Since Woodruff died in 1879 and had left Indianapolis two or three years earlier, the fountains and statuary probably date from between 1872 and 1877. He appears to have given up hope of financial success from the sale of lots in Woodruff Place ("Death of J. O. Woodruff," Indianapolis Journal, June 5, 1879, p. 8).

The city directory for 1874 lists Woodruff as proprietor of Woodruff Place (Swartz and Tedrowe's Annual Indianapolis City Directory). For 1875, 1876, and 1877 his residence is given as Woodruff Place, and for 1878 there is no listing for him (Swartz and Tedrowe's Indianapolis City Directory, 1875, ending March 1876; Swartz and Co.'s Indianapolis City Directory, 1876, ending March 1877; S. E. Tilford & Co.'s Indianapolis City Directory 1877, ending February 1877; R. L. Polk and Co.'s Directory for 1878).

Woodruff Place is built up of houses that are mainly two-story,

boxy wooden versions of the late Queen Anne Revival style of the late nineteenth century. They have shingled gables, clapboard walls, and spacious front porches with classical columns. Two or three of these houses are of the shingle wall, gambrel roofed variety of the style. There are only about a half dozen houses in the earlier jig-saw molding and fretwork mode, and these were the first ones built. Among the later styles there are about a half dozen California bungalows, as out of place in this alien mid-western clime as are an equal number of Imitation Tudor houses. There are three or four small apartment buildings, built as such and not converted residences, silent commentary to the slip-ups in the attempt at all residential zoning versus special cases, and there are as many houses built later than 1920. The whole neighborhood, then, is a complete residential community. It remains largely unchanged from the turn of the century. There are no vacant lots and no abandoned houses with windows broken or boarded up.

5. Alterations and additions: The original street lighting was gas, even as late as 1908 (Art Work of Indianapolis, Indiana, 1908, Part 4; Picturesque Indianapolis; Indianapolis Illustrated, 1889, Parts 1, 2, 3, 6, and 8; Bicknell, Indianapolis Illustrated, 1893, p. 128). These standards are simple wooden posts with the gas lighting fixture on top. The present electrical standards of iron with five globes are of later date, of course. A photograph published in 1897 shows continuous paving which appears to be asphalt and curbs which appear to be concrete (Hyman's Handbook of Indianapolis, 1897, pp. 29, 30).

In 1972 the Indianapolis Park and Recreation Department began a program to restore the fountains, figures and urns and plant new trees and shrubs as replacements for the original plantings. The city Transportation Department made appropriations to replace the old light standards using the original fluted molds.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Subdivision:

James O. Woodruff is a figure of some historic interest. He was a native of Auburn, N. Y., educated at Andover College, Mass. He came to Indianapolis in 1870 (Nowland, Sketches, p. 384). His brother Harmon was president of the Indianapolis Water Works. James organized the company which erected the Holly System of Waterworks, to which he was elected president. Subsequently he organized a lottery scheme, which failed.

"In 1872, during the fever of speculation, he conceived the

Woodruff Place project, in which he invested \$80,000 cash, and until the panic came spent large sums in beautifying and adorning the place. Failing in this he closed out and went to New York, and for the past two or three years has been working on his scheme of a scientific expedition around the world." ("Death of J. O. Woodruff").

Residents of Woodruff place included one of the six survivors of the Greely Farthest North Expedition in 1884, one resident was granted a medal by the Emperor of China, and the founder of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra lived there. Woodruff Place was the model for the "Amberson Addition" described in such detail in Booth Tarkington's 1919 Pulitzer Prize novel "The Magnificent Ambersons."

Woodruff Place was not Woodruff's only platted subdivision in Indianapolis. On April 1, 1876 he had purchased 24 acres of land from Thomas A. Hendricks just south of the city limits (Deed Record Town Lots 54, p. 626), and on the same day platted the land as a residential subdivision of one hundred lots. The two principal streets of the subdivision, now called South Alabama Street and South New Jersey Street, are shown with esplanades similar in plan to those of Woodruff Place (Plat Book 4, p. 45). The esplanades were in fact built and landscaped, but they do not have statuary or fountains. (See HABS report on Thomas A. Hendricks House, IND-64).

Woodruff Place was not able to get city fire and police protection so it was decided to incorporate. A petition for incorporation was heard on March 16, 1876, but was opposed by City Attorney Byfield. The area was incorporated as a town on August 8, 1876. Fire protection was obtained by paying for a main connection with the city and donating fifty dollars to the pension fund. Pupils paid tuition in the public schools of Indianapolis. In 1894 the town levied a \$0.25 per hundred school tax, which was paid to the Indianapolis School Board. Annexation to the city, however, was resisted because residents feared loss of their park features. The population of Woodruff Place was 20 in 1880, 161 in 1890, and 477 in 1900 (Dunn, p. 384).

A newspaper article noted that in 1959 more than 51% of the property owners of Woodruff Place opposed annexation. An Indianapolis city ordinance annexing Woodruff Place was being reviewed then by the courts ("Annexation," Indianapolis News, April 22, 1959, p. 1). The area is now (1971) a part of the City of Indianapolis.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views:

"Entrance to Woodruff Place," by Braden and Barford, H. R. Page and Co., Indianapolis Illustrated, 1889. Large fountain at intersection of Cross Drive and East Drive, looking north, ca. 1888, photographer and source of photo unknown.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Plat Books and Deed Records Town Lots are located in the County Recorder's Office, City-County Building, Indianapolis, Indiana.

b. Secondary and published sources:

"Annexation," Indianapolis News, April 22, 1959, p. 1.

Art Work of Indianapolis, Indiana, Gravure Illustration Co., 1908. Published in nine parts, pages unnumbered.

Bicknell, Ernest P., Indianapolis Illustrated, Indianapolis, 1893.

"Death of J. O. Woodruff," Indianapolis Journal, June 5, 1879, p. 8.

Dunn, Jacob Piatt, Greater Indianapolis, Vol. I. Chicago, 1910.

Hyman, Max, editor, Hyman's Handbook of Indianapolis, Indianapolis, 1897.

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Indianapolis Illustrated, H. R. Page Co., 1889. Published in several parts, pages unnumbered.

Nowland, John H. B., Sketches of Prominent Citizens of 1876, Indianapolis, 1877.

Picturesque Indianapolis, no date. (An advertisement in the book is dated 1889), pages not numbered.

R. L. Polk and Co.'s Indianapolis Directory for 1878, Indianapolis, 1878.

S. E. Tilford & Co.'s Indianapolis Directory for 1878, Indianapolis, 1877.

Swartz and Co.'s Indianapolis City Directory 1876 ending  
March 1877, Indianapolis, 1877.

Swartz and Tedrowe's Annual Indianapolis City Directory  
1874, Indianapolis, 1874.

Swartz and Tedrowe's Indianapolis City Directory 1875  
ending March, 1876, Indianapolis, 1876.

3. Likely sources not yet investigated:

Deeds of particular properties within Woodruff Place, recorded in the County Recorder's Office, City-County Building, Indianapolis.

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PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was financed by joint funds of the National Park Service and the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indianapolis. The project was under the general direction of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Professor Wesley I. Shank of Iowa State University prepared the historical data, and Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer, provided the photographic record. H. Roll McLaughlin, FAIA, State Preservation Coordinator, President of the Historic Landmarks Foundation, and member of the HABS Advisory Board, served as consultant throughout the project. This report was edited for HABS in 1977 by Candace Reed.